

Seatbelts fail to prevent tragedy: No one buckled-up

BALLINGER, Texas — You can bet the farm the attorneys will be all over this one.

A cutaway bus operated by Abilene Christian University crashed last month, hitting a concrete culvert, rolling completely over, and ejecting 12 of the 16 passengers on board.

Tragically, a student was pro-

nounced dead at the scene. Four others were critically injured.

What made the crash unusual? Every seat in the bus was equipped with a seatbelt but only the driver was wearing one.

Texas law does not require passengers of this type of vehicle to wear seatbelts.

You can bet the absence of a

seatbelt buckle-up requirement won't provide any kind of legal protection, just as the absence of federal regulations requiring seatbelts on over-the-road buses is increasingly being ignored as a defense in crashes where seat ejections result in horrible consequences.

Once seatbelts become the law of the land, there seems little doubt

the industry will suffer through another period of litigation over the issue of buckle-up rules, compliance with buckle-up rules, and the adequacy of policing of buckle-up requirements.

In the Ballinger crash, fatigue has been preliminarily cited by investigators as a possible cause of the disaster.

The school-owned bus was carrying 12 agricultural studies students, three faculty members and a faculty member's wife from Abilene to Medina, Texas, where they were going to spend the weekend doing mission work at a children's home.

The Texas Department of Public Safety said the 34-year-old driver,

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Electronic logs Tennessee operator switches entire fleet

GREENEVILLE, Tenn. — While federal safety regulators and politicians wrangle over the issue of whether to mandate electronic onboard recorders for over-the-road buses and truckers, Greene Coach Company here has adopted the devices and placed them on all of its buses.

Greene becomes the first coach operator in the U.S. to install the ISE Fleet Services eFleetSuite EOBR solution across its fleet, and maybe the only operator in the U.S. to have totally trashed conventional logbooks.

Drivers at Greene Coach are paperless for compliance with federal regulations governing hours of service, and will be using the system shortly for driver vehicle inspection reports (DVIR).

Says Russell Ooten, owner and CEO at Greene Coach: "I am very pleased with the results of our transition to electronic logs and inspection reports, using the eFleetSuite system. Drivers have found the system easy to use and we



Greene Coach driver Phil Casteel logs in on his touch-screen electronic onboard recorder.

have already seen productivity increases from automated information capture and record retention.

"Furthermore, having available driver hours visible in both the coach and (via the) web enables us to better plan our stops and events that are consistent with driver's duty limits and deter conflicting demands by tour directors," said Ooten.

eFleetSuite from ISE Fleet Services is

designed as a safety and compliance application aimed at reducing risk, preventing accidents, boosting productivity and managing Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration compliance.

The system includes the mDash 4, a rugged in-cab EOBR that helps drivers stay within safety and compliance parameters.

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Diesel shortages hit U.S. heartland

OMAHA, Neb. — Diesel fuel shortages have been reported in northern Plains states and parts of the Midwest, and they're expected to continue for several more weeks.

According to the *Omaha World-Herald*, a "severe mismatch between diesel fuel supply and demand" has meant some retailers have run out of diesel for short periods.

The shortages have been reported in Nebraska, western Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota and the Dakotas.

The problem appears to stem from peak demand during the fall harvest, plus unusually high demand due to North Dakota's oil development boom.

Some fuel truck drivers are spending hours waiting in line, or are shut out of fuel terminals in Omaha and Council Bluffs, Iowa, according to the newspaper, waiting for fuel to arrive via pipeline.

Over time, fuel will be moved around where it's needed, ending the spot shortages, said John Felmy, chief economist for the American Petroleum Institute.

In addition, as the fall harvest winds down, supplies should begin to catch up with demand.

The *Lincoln (Neb.) Journal-Star* reported the

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Daimler readies better-than-eyes vision technology

STUTTGART, Germany — Safe driving involves the synchronized use of brakes, steering and throttle.

But beyond those important elements is the most-critical factor — the brain, eyes, hands and feet that coordinate it all.

As research has shown time

and time again, the eyes and brain are sometimes not up to the task of assuring over-the-road safety.

Engineers at the world headquarters of Daimler A.G. here are working on an ambitious project, called 6D Vision technology, designed to give the brain and eyes a measurable boost.

The company calls it "the basis for new assistance systems and a key step along the road to accident-free driving."

Also referred to as "spatial vision," it's said to assure "instant recognition" of dangerous traffic situations. It's also all about augmenting human vision and speeding up an

understanding of what's in front of the vehicle, then reacting to it.

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Bus inspection dispute in North Carolina touches off firestorm

MOUNT OLIVE, N.C. — A long-time bus safety inspector in North Carolina has resigned from Consolidated Safety Services because of its highly controversial plans to require motorcoach operators to pay for safety inspections to continue transporting children for many of the state's school districts.

Reggie Hines, who joined Consolidated Safety Services in 2010, following a long career of providing school bus safety inspections in North Carolina, said he quit because he could no longer support the business practices of CSS and its recently formed marketing arm, Transportation Safety

Exchange (TSX).

"They're forcing the operators to buy back their own customers," Hines contends.

He said he fears a number of operators will either refuse or be unable to pay the inspection fee, and those that do likely will increase their charges to the counties to make up for the new expense.

"This means the counties will have fewer carriers at a higher cost, which would not be good for them," he maintains.

The issue highlights the real possibility of smaller operators being foreclosed from serving school districts in small and rural communi-

ties. Some see it as a form of economic regulation in disguise.

Hines also suggested that TSX appears to be advancing the notion that small carriers that are unable to pay the inspection fee are less than safe or bad carriers.

"While that might be true in some cases, in the majority of instances I don't believe that," he asserted.

CSS declined to comment on Hines' resignation because of a company policy that prohibits it from discussing former employees, according to program manager Phil Hanley.

The Fairfax, Va.-based compa-

ny has been in business since 1988 and is best known in the industry for its management of a bus safety inspection program for the U.S. Department of Defense. It also operates what it calls its Pupil Transportation Safety Program that certifies carriers for school districts.

More recently, it was hired by GO Ground Options of Chicago to manage a safety inspection program for the National College Athletic Association. That program also has drawn criticism from operators over a requirement they pay for inspections to continue transporting college athletes to post-season tournaments. (See Nov. 15 and Nov. 1

issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

CSS and TSX brought the Pupil Transportation Safety Program to North Carolina last year and hired Hines to coordinate it. He reportedly was recruited because he was running his own bus safety inspection business in the state and had 52 of the 100 counties under contract.

"It went well the first year but then they wanted to change things for this school year," he said, noting that originally 57 counties signed up for Pupil Transportation Safety Program.

Initially, he said, CSS and TSX

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Massachusetts finally gets casinos

BOSTON — After years of delays and resistance, three resort casinos and a slots parlor appear to be on their way to Massachusetts.

Roulette wheels could be turning as early as 2013 in a swank resort gambling palace on the site of Suffolk Downs horserace track in East Boston.

Massachusetts' lawmakers gave final approval last month to a bill legalizing casino gambling in the state. The legislation was sent to

Gov. Deval Patrick, who was expected to sign it as this issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News* went to press.

The Suffolk Downs facility, which is primed for fast-track construction, is expected to be the Bay State's first casino. One estimate has it opening a full year before others because it's already a gaming facility with a functioning structure.

A source close to Suffolk Downs' operations said the opening

schedule depends on getting a state license, which could take months.

Dropped from the final bill was a so-called Happy Hour provision, which would have let restaurants and bars serve free and discounted drinks if casinos could.

Casinos will be allowed to serve free drinks only on the gaming floor, and the Alcoholic Beverages Control Commission will conduct a two-year study of the state's liquor laws.

Experts: R.I., N.H. will be next

MASHANTUCKET, Conn. — Gambling industry experts meeting here last month at the MGM Grand at Foxwoods said other New England states will have little choice but to legalize full-scale gambling now that Massachusetts is poised to approve licensing casinos and a slots parlor.

Massachusetts legislators approved a bill allowing licensing of up to three resort-style casinos

and a slots parlor, and sent it to Gov. Deval Patrick's desk.

To protect gambling tax revenues, Rhode Island and New Hampshire will have to allow table games, one specialist said at the New England Gaming Summit.

"I absolutely believe they will take a significant hit when Massachusetts legalizes gaming," said Gregory Roselli, a UBS financial analyst, of the Twin River slots parlor in Lincoln, R.I.

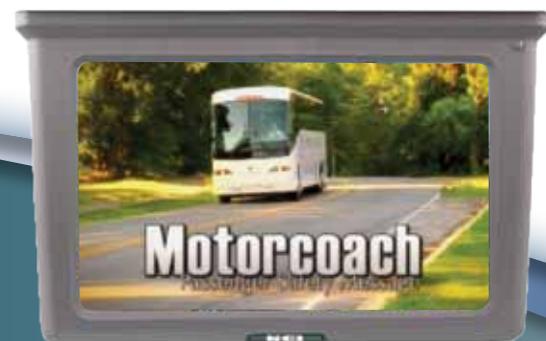
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THE DOCKET

Washington state voters give green light to tolls

OLYMPIA, Wash. — A majority of voters in Washington state say they want to move forward with using tolls to pay for road and bridge work.

Nearly 53 percent of voters statewide rejected last month a multifaceted question that would have prevented tolls on one roadway from being used on a different road.

Approval by voters of Initiative 1125 would have put an end to talk about potential tolls on Interstate 90 being used on a state Route 520 construction project.

State officials opposed the initiative because they said it could hurt Washington's chances of finding investors for projects. They told voters in the weeks before the election that the question threatened vital transportation projects and economic growth.

Among other provisions of the ballot question was a requirement that tolls end on a road or bridge once the project's construction is paid off, such as the Tacoma Narrows Bridge.

Variable toll rates that depend on the time of day drivers use the road or bridge would also have been outlawed. The pay plan is currently used on state Route 167 high-occupancy toll lanes.

Another provision called for requiring legislative approval for each project, as well as to make lawmakers solely responsible for setting toll rates.

Critics of the plan said such a change could effectively act as a roadblock to getting toll projects done. There was fear that putting lawmakers in charge of the process could make it very difficult to increase tolls.

Missouri plans tolling of I-70

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — The director of the Missouri Department of Transportation wants the state General Assembly to authorize tolls along Interstate 70.

The state has had approval from the Federal Highway Administration since 2005 to place tolls on the roadway as one of four states allowed to do so under a pilot program.

Now, the *Kansas City Star* reports the highway department would like to form a partnership where a consortium of contractors would come together and build the highway, recouping their expenses from tolls.

For more than 10 years, the state has been trying to figure out how to pay for rehabilitating and expanding I-70, which is one of the oldest stretches of interstate in the system.

Coalition: Let states impose tolling on federal highways

MADISON, Wis. — A coalition of highway construction groups in nearly a dozen states has launched a campaign aimed at convincing Congress to allow states to impose tolls to pay for highway improvements.

The U.S. Tolling Coalition says Congress should provide maximum flexibility to states to add tolls to any portion of their interstate or federal highways for the purpose of reconstruction and rehabilitation.

"Seventeen percent of our interstates and one-quarter of our nation's bridges are structurally deficient," says Coalition co-chairman Patrick Goss, executive director of the Wisconsin Transportation Builders Association.

"With Congress struggling to find the money to meet basic maintenance needs, allowing more tolling will stretch dollars,

jump start construction projects and create new jobs."

Under a pilot program, the U.S. Department of Transportation recently gave Virginia preliminary approval to add tolls along I-95 to pay for upkeep. Missouri also has been cleared to add tolls. The U.S. Tolling Coalition wants to expand the program nationwide, which requires congressional authorization.

Coalition co-chairman Don Shubert, who is also president of the Connecticut Construction Industries Association, said: "States are confronting accelerating pavement deterioration due to age and high traffic. As a result, American business is hurting and we need to act now to give states the power to toll."

More information on the coalition can be found at www.us-tollingcoalition.com.

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Senate panel OKs highway bill

WASHINGTON — The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee has unanimously reported out a bill that would reauthorize the federal highway and public transportation program for two years.

While the vote is a welcome development for those in the transportation community who have been waiting for action since the current program expired more than two years ago, the measure faces daunting obstacles to passage by the full Senate.

Most significantly, it still is missing a critical funding provision.

The bill calls for \$109 billion in spending over the two years, which would equal the current level plus inflation, but the money that will be available from the Highway Trust Fund falls about \$12 billion short.

The Senate committee is counting on one of its key members, Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., who also chairs the Senate Finance Committee, to find the \$12 billion.

"We will, one way or another, by hook or crook, find the resources on a bipartisan basis to pay for this bill," said Baucus.

Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., the ranking Republican on the committee, made it clear

that if the money cannot be found, the bill will not move forward.

There is much more work to be done by other Senate committees on the highway package. The bill, called Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21), is just one of several measures the Senate must pass.

The Senate Finance Committee must clear the funding portion. The Senate Banking Committee has jurisdiction over transit issues and has been working on an infrastructure bank initiative. And the Senate Commerce Committee is working on a safety bill that may go to markup next month.

Passage of a Senate bill will get the highway program only halfway home.

The House still is working on its version, a six-year bill that, like the Senate bill, is not yet fully funded.

House leaders have discussed the possibility of supplementing Highway Trust Fund revenues by permitting expanded domestic energy production.

That could lead to a two-year Senate bill funded by found money, and a six-year House bill funded by a new kind of fuel tax. Such a difference could be difficult to resolve.

Feds shut down N.C. passenger van operator

WASHINGTON — A Charlotte, N.C., passenger van company has shut down after the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration declared it an imminent hazard to public safety.

Following a compliance review, the FMCSA ordered ATA Trail Inc. to immediately cease all transportation services.

The safety inspection found that ATA Trail was in violation of multiple federal standards, including using drivers without the required medical qualifications, violating hours-of-service rules, operating without the proper insurance, and using vehicles that were not regularly inspected and repaired.

Full equipment write-offs will expire at end of year

WASHINGTON — Federal tax law allows businesses of all sizes to take a full write-off, or what is called 100 percent bonus depreciation, of almost any capital equipment, including rolling stock, placed in service during 2011.

But this provision expires at the end of December, and Congress may not extend it.

As it stands now, the law will allow smaller businesses to take only 50 percent bonus depreciation on new equipment next year, and there are certain limits on that.

The key section of the Internal Revenue Service code dealing with deductions and bonus depreciation is section 179. Many people think a section-179 deduction is an arcane or complicated tax provision; experts say it isn't.

Essentially, section 179 allows businesses to deduct the full purchase price of qualifying equipment and/or software purchased or financed during the tax year.

That means that if you buy (or lease) a piece of qualifying equipment, you can deduct the full purchase price from your gross income. It's an incentive created by Congress to encourage businesses to buy equipment and invest in themselves.

Today, section 179 is one of the few incentives contained in any of the recent economic stimulus legislation that actually helps small business.

Although large businesses also benefit from section 179, or bonus depreciation, the original target of this legislation was to provide tax relief for small business.

Essentially, section 179 works like this:

When a business buys certain items of equipment, it typically gets to write them off a little at a time through depreciation. In other words, if a company spends \$50,000 on a machine, it gets to write off (say) \$10,000 a year for five years (these numbers are only meant as an example).

Now, while it's true that this is better than no write off at all, most business owners would naturally prefer to write off the entire equipment purchase price for the year they buy it.

In fact, if a business could write off the entire amount, it might add more equipment this year instead of waiting. That's the thinking behind section 179 — to motivate the American business to move in a positive direction.

For most small businesses, adding equipment, software and vehicle purchases totaling less than \$500,000 in 2011, the entire cost can be written-off on the 2011 tax return.

For large businesses adding more than \$500,000, the write-offs are just as substantial. The accompanying graphic provides an example of the savings available after the Tax Relief Act of 2010 passed a year ago.

Limits of section 179

Section 179 does come with limits. There are caps to the total amount written off (\$500,000 in 2011). The deduction begins to phase out dollar-for-dollar after \$2 million is spent by a given business, so this makes it a true small- and medium-sized business deduction.

2011 Equipment Purchases:	\$650,000
First Year Write Off:	\$500,000
<small>(Under the new law, \$500,000 is the maximum Section 179 write-off in 2011)</small>	
Bonus First Year Depreciation:	\$150,000
<small>(On remaining value: \$650k - \$500k = \$150k x 100% = \$150k)</small>	
Normal First Year Depreciation:	\$0
<small>(20% depreciation in each of 5 years)</small>	
Total First Year Depreciation:	\$650,000
<small>(\$500k + \$150k = \$650k)</small>	
Tax Savings:	\$277,500
<small>(Assume 35% tax rate. \$650k x 35% = \$227.5k)</small>	
Total Equipment Cost:	\$422,500
<small>(\$650k less all tax deductions of \$227.5k)</small>	

After passage of the Tax Relief Act of 2010, large businesses that exceed the \$2 million in capital expenditure can take bonus depreciation of 100 percent on the amount that exceeds the limit.

All businesses that purchase, finance and/or lease less than \$2 million in new or used business equipment during 2011, should qualify for the section 179 deduction.

If a business is unprofitable in 2011, and has no taxable income to use the deduction, that business can elect to use 100 percent bonus depreciation and carry-forward to a year when the business is profitable.

What's the difference between section 179 and bonus depreciation?

The most important difference is both new

and used equipment qualify for a section 179 deduction (as long as the used equipment is "new to you"), while bonus depreciation covers new equipment only.

Bonus depreciation is useful to larger businesses spending more than \$2 million on new capital equipment in 2011; also businesses with a net loss in 2011 qualify to deduct the cost of new equipment.

When applying these provisions, section 179 is generally taken first, followed by bonus depreciation — unless the business has no taxable profit in 2011 (the unprofitable business is allowed to carry the loss forward to future years).

The equipment, vehicle(s), and/or software must be used for business purposes more than 50 percent of the time to qualify for the section 179 deduction.

Almost all types of business equipment qualify for the section 179 deduction.

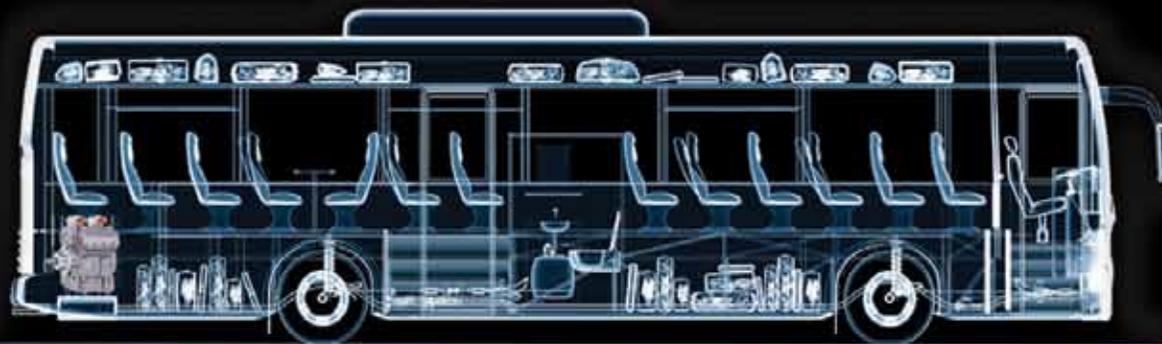
All businesses need equipment on an ongoing basis, be it machinery, computers, software, office furniture, vehicles, or other tangible goods.

It's very likely that your business has purchased many of these goods during the past year, and will do so again and again. Section 179 is designed to make purchasing that equipment during 2011 financially attractive.

Remember, to qualify for the section 179 deduction, the below equipment must be purchased and put into use between Jan. 1, 2011,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6 ►

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States talk fuel tax increases

The days of state legislators being unwilling to consider higher fuel taxes — to pay for transportation projects — may be ending.

Officials in multiple states are deciding whether to tackle the issue that has been off limits for years.

In Maryland, leading officials are talking about taking the plunge during the upcoming legislative session. Gov. Martin O'Malley recently said there would be more money available for cities and towns throughout the state to make

road improvements if state fuel tax rates are increased.

The state's fuel tax rates have remained unchanged for 20 years. The tax rate for diesel is 24.25 cents per gallon, and the tax for gasoline is 23.5 cents per gallon.

O'Malley supports indexing the tax rates to inflation.

In Iowa, the governor's Citizen Advisory Commission voted unanimously to endorse a proposal to increase the state fuel tax rate by 8 to 10 cents per gallon.

However, Gov. Terry Branstad has indicated he will not support such a move during the upcoming session. Instead, he's looking for cost savings.

Talk about a tax increase in Tennessee also appears to be premature.

Gov. Bill Haslam said declining fuel tax revenues will end up causing the state a lot of problems down the road. Still, he said current economic conditions warrant taking no action at this time.

Lawsuit over fuel economy standards

WASHINGTON — A legal firm representing a group of small trucking and construction business owners in California has filed a federal lawsuit challenging the federal government's new fuel-economy standards for heavy- and medium-duty vehicles.

The suit, filed by Pacific Legal Foundation in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, charges that federal officials were legally required to submit the regulations for independent scientific scrutiny but

failed to do so.

PLF represents the California Dump Truck Owners Association, Southern California Contractors Association, Dalton Trucking of Fontana, Calif., and Delta Construction Company of Sacramento.

The regulations, announced in August, are the first-ever federal fuel efficiency and greenhouse gas pollution standards for medium- and heavy-duty vehicles, including buses (see Sept. 1 *Bus & Motorcoach News*). They were promulgated jointly by the U.S. Environ-

mental Protection Agency and the National Highway Transportation and Safety Administration.

"Federal law says EPA can't issue new clean-air regulations without submitting the proposals for independent scrutiny by its Science Advisory Board," said PLF Senior Staff Attorney Ted Hadzi-Antich. "EPA recklessly ignored this requirement."

The regulations affect new trucks and buses built in 2014 through 2018. No retrofits are required.

Safest curbside operators aren't found on the curb

WASHINGTON — For more than six months, the National Transportation Safety Board studied the safety of curbside operators, concluding that driver fatigue and other driver fitness issues were to blame for the higher fatal-accident rate among curbside carriers. (See Nov. 15 *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

It now appears the NTSB investigators got it all wrong and could have avoided months of probing and analyzing.

All they needed do was ask the District of Columbia's delegate to Congress, Eleanor Holmes Norton, who has a different take on the safety of curbside operators.

"Low-cost carriers that insist upon picking people up at the curbside are the ones that are involved in the most accidents," says Holmes Norton.

The representative made her

comment at the opening last month of Union Station as the new hub for many curbside operators serving Washington. (See July 15, July 1 and June 1 issues of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

megabus.com, BoltBus, Washington Deluxe and DC2NY are some of the curbside carriers that are being consolidated in the back of Union Station, turning it into a bustling depot that also will serve Greyhound Lines.

"The carriers here are providing, we think, the safest form of transportation in the United States," said Norton.

"We want (these buses) off of our streets because they bring with them not only more accidents, but they pollute the street corners," Norton continued. "This (bus depot) is the proper place to catch a bus, especially in the Nation's Capital."

Bonus depreciation

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

and Dec. 31, 2011.

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Midwest Bus/Motorcoach Association meets, chooses leaders

LISLE, Ill. — The nine-month-old Midwest Bus and Motorcoach Association took a big leap forward last month when it conducted its first convention and trade show.

The convention, which is slated to become an annual event, drew operators and suppliers from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan and Missouri, the Midwest states from which the association membership is drawn.

Judging by comments from those who attended, the event was a large success.

“It was a great first meeting,” said one industry executive.

“For me it was beneficial to meet and to get to know (everyone) more personally. I hope this organization affords us the opportunity to represent and become soldiers for the bus and motorcoach industry,” said an operator who drove four-and-a-half hours to attend.

Since the association was formed last August, it has been working to develop its membership and launch its first major event, conducted at a hotel here.

During the first day of the two-day meeting, members formulated bylaws and plans. The initial business meeting produced many great ideas and the members were excited and motivated to get the organization moving, said Cherie Houser, the association executive director.

The members also elected the association’s first board of directors and later, at a board meeting, the first officers were chosen.

The initial directors and officers are: Tom Bazow, president, Excursions Trailways in Fort Wayne, Ind.; Pat Greteman, vice president, Windstar Lines in Carroll, Iowa; Ryan Cupp, secretary, Blue Lakes Charters & Tours in Clio, Mich.; Don Ferrone, treasurer, Prairie Trailways of Chicago; Brian Whitaker, Chicagoland Transportation Solutions of Barrington, Ill.; Dan Shoup, Cardinal Buses of Middlebury, Ind.; Rich DeYoung, Motor Coach Industries of Crown Point, Ind.; Marty Bradley, Burlington Trailways of West Burlington, Iowa; Dale Richardson, Compass Coach of Cedar Springs, Mich.; Paul Flavin, Prevost Car of Novi, Mich.; Rex Tennyson, USA Tours of Rolla, Mo.; Liz Stanley, Branson Gray Line of Hollister, Mo., and Pete Bachrach, ABC Companies of Faribault, Minn.

To assure members abide by the code of ethics established by the association, the organization named a “safety officer.” Ted Littell of White Knight Coaches in Columbia, Mo., volunteered for the post.

The code of ethics is posted on the association website (www.mbmca.org) and printed in the membership brochure/application.

A marketing committee was

formed and will be jointly headed by Dennis Streif of Vandalia Bus Lines in Caseyville, Ill., and Gary Hodgson of Prevost Car in Elgin, Ill.

Following the business meeting was a welcome reception with 18 vendors exhibiting for the 28-member companies represented at the convention.

“The vendors were supportive of

the organization’s formation and their ideas for future meetings will help MBMCA grow,” said Houser.

The following day, vendors were available to interact with members, and breakout sessions included federal regulatory and political updates from Ken Presley of the United Motorcoach Association and Clyde Hart of the American Bus Association.

Steve Mattioli, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration Illinois administrator, provided an update on the agency’s Compliance Safety Accountability Program and other USDOT-related issues.

Michelle Silvestro of National Interstate Insurance offered insight into dealing with a catastrophic event.

“Members expressed their commitment to move forward, and with tremendous support from the industry, many programs and ideas were formulated for the future,” said Houser.

For more information, go to www.mbmca.org, or contact Houser by email at Cherie@mbmca.org, or phone (608) 354-7110.



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The pre-trip inspection: A critical part of a safe trip

By Joe Schirck III

When was the last time you stood in the doorway of your business and watched your driver doing a pre-trip inspection of his/her motorcoach?

Did you hear the engine shut off, remain silent for 60 seconds (while the service brake was held to check for leaks), and then the swish, swish, swish as the air pressure was bleed down to test the air-brake alarm, and the parking brake pop-up check?

If you didn't, then your driver probably did not conduct a proper pre-trip inspection.

In Florida, when performing the vehicle inspection portion of the CDL test, if you fail to do every step of this brake check, in the proper order, it's an automatic failure no matter how well you did on the rest of the vehicle inspection.

In pre-CDL days, there was no national standard for a commercial vehicle inspection by the driver. Detailed inspections for compliance with Part 393 of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations were considered more of a maintenance responsibility.

The "conscientious" motorcoach driver, in those days, would likely walk around and check lights, fluids, fuel, belts, kick the tires, look at the tread, make sure the bus was clean and the toilet had water, then start the engine, tap the brakes as he or she left the yard to make sure they worked, and feel like they were doing a good job.

Some detail-minded drivers or owner-operators may have gone into more depth, of course.

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations Part 396.13 does not go into detail regarding a proper vehicle inspection. It merely states the driver must "be satisfied that

the motor vehicle is in safe operating condition."

With no detailed federal regulation concerning a pre-trip inspection, the CDL vehicle inspection, as currently tested, could possibly be regarded as an industry best practice prior to operating a commercial motor vehicle.

Section 396.11 is really about post-trip inspections and lists only 11 items that are to be checked. This is hardly sufficient to determine if a coach is roadworthy.

With the advent of "standardized" CDL testing in the 1990s, most drivers who were not grandfathered in have some idea of what constitutes a "proper" pre-trip vehicle inspection.

I qualify "standardized" because not all states or testers follow American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators' criteria as delineated. Professional and conscientious drivers always take it upon themselves to complete a proper pre-trip.

Consider adopting a pre-trip checklist for your drivers.

The company pre-trip checklist I have generated for our drivers

contains about 90 separate items for them to check. This does not count the items you can't check on a motorcoach short of putting it on a lift or pulling over a pit, such as pulling your slack adjusters, checking your drive shaft and u-joints, and so on.

Hopefully, your maintenance program will catch such things before they become a problem.

My list includes passenger and driver amenities, such as the restroom supplies/operation, interior lights, fuel keys, DVDs, monitors, toll pass, and the like. All of our drivers are given a one-page laminated copy of this checklist, which I require them to keep with them and use. I also give them a four-page detailed explanation list.

Last and definitely not least, I recommend incorporating pre-trip requirements into your training regimen. During my 40-hour initial driver training, orientation and evaluation, I spend a few hours of classroom time on executing a proper pre-trip.

This is reinforced every day during training when the students conduct a pre-trip (verbally telling

me what they are looking for) before their daily driving evaluations.

I have drivers do the 11 steps for performing a brake check as follows:

1. Check engine (fluids, belts, etc.).
2. Turn on master switch (if applicable).
3. Safe start (check for neutral, parking brake on, start engine).
4. Build air pressure until gauges show full (usually 120 pounds) or relief valve kicks off.
5. Shut engine off (turning the key back on).
6. Release parking brake.
7. Leak check (hold foot on service brake for 60 seconds making sure the air does not leak more than 3 psi).
8. Alarm check. Fan brakes to drop air pressure somewhere between 40-to-60 psi (for most coaches; check manufacturer manuals). Visual and audible alarms should activate.
9. Spring brake (pop-up check). Continue to fan air pressure down somewhere between 20-to-40 psi (again check manufacturer manuals). The parking brake should

engage.

10. Restart engine (again, using safe start).

11. Rebuild air pressure.

Take the time with your drivers to make sure they can do it in the correct sequence. If it's an automatic failure for CDL testing, the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators must believe it's important.

I urge you to properly train your drivers on pre-trip inspections and encourage them to pay attention to detail. Most of the pre-trip is merely a matter of observing details and can be done in about 20 minutes. Allow enough lead time for your driver to come to the garage and do a proper pre-trip.

By taking 20 minutes to do a pre-trip, your driver can save your company a \$1,000 tow bill, loss of repeat business, and/or the ire of unhappy customers who will invariably expect compensation for time lost or a refund. It could also save you points on your CSA score should your driver be selected for a roadside inspection.

A good resource for vehicle inspection information is your state CDL driver's manual. Some are available online.

Here is a website that lists where you can find the manual for your state: www.testquestionsandanswers.com/cdl/ or email me at joe3@annettbuslines.com and I will be happy to send you a copy of my pre-trip checklist.

Joe Schirck III is a retired Naval Reserve hospital corpsman, and is a 22-year Kansas firefighter veteran. He has 11 years in the transportation industry, six as a school bus/motorcoach driver, five as safety director for Annett Bus Lines. He also is a certified third-party CDL tester for the state of Florida.

Trucker cited in fatal New York bus crash

ROCHESTER, N.Y. — An investigation by New York State Police has found that a Michigan truck driver had ample time to avoid rear-ending a slow-moving charter coach on an upstate highway but failed to brake and died in the fiery crash that injured most of the passengers on the bus.

The early morning crash in July happened when a Farr's Coach Lines bus, traveling from Canada to New York, merged back onto the New York State Thruway after pulling over to perform a regeneration of its exhaust after-treatment

system. (See Sept. 15 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

The coach was hit by a tractor-trailer driven by Timothy Hume. The bus burst into flames and 59-year-old Hume was killed.

State Police Investigator James Hunt said Hume could have fallen asleep or been distracted when he smashed into the bus.

The incident attracted widespread interest in the motorcoach industry, focusing attention on the need for drivers to carefully monitor emissions system warning signals so they don't end up having to

shutdown at a potentially unsafe location.

The driver of the coach had completed a stationary regeneration of the emissions system alongside the roadway and was pulling back onto the highway but was unable to get the coach up to speed, according to investigators. He was returning to the shoulder when the tractor-trailer rear-ended the coach.

Although the coach was carrying 52 passengers, they all were able to get off — with help from passersby — before fire consumed the bus.

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CDL self-certification process demands attention by all

To the Editor

Thank you for the article in the Nov. 15 issue of *Bus & Motorcoach News* (page 18), regarding the upcoming CDL holder self-certification process.

The essence of the new Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration regulation, originally printed in the Dec. 1, 2008 issue of the *Federal Register*, was captured well in your article and is an excellent alert to all CDL holders and bus operators to pay attention to their state licensing agency mail during the next two years.

I would like to urge your readers to take this important issue a step further, though.

Beginning Jan. 30, 2012, all state licensing agencies must begin notifying their CDL holders of the new requirements of self-certification and submission of medical examiner certificates if driving interstate (in most cases).

In Pennsylvania, there are 400,000 CDL holders, so this is going to be a lengthy — as well as meticulous task — for PennDOT.

I can't stress enough to the bus operators and state bus associations all across our nation to get in

touch with their own state licensing agency soon, ask for copies of letters they intend to send out to CDL holders so the bus operators can alert their drivers.

If a CDL holder chooses to ignore communication from their state licensing agency regarding the self-certification issue, then he or she risks a CDL downgrade that results in the loss of the ability to drive a commercial vehicle.

If this sounds like a severe "penalty," it is. There will be many CDL holders in the U.S. scratching

their heads during the next several years wondering why they suddenly had their licenses downgraded.

All CDL holders must be in the FMCSA CDLIS system as having self-certified to their state licensing agency no later than Jan. 30, 2014. BUT, the state licensing agency must start the process by Jan. 30, 2012 — no exceptions.

As executive director of the Pennsylvania Bus Association, I have been in constant contact with PennDOT, worked with the Governor's Office and state House/Sen-

ate transportation committee chairs to pass much-needed vehicle code amendments to implement this new FMCSA regulation.

Once this occurs, PennDOT has agreed to share with PBA and others samples of correspondence that will be sent to CDL holders in Pennsylvania. We sincerely appreciate PennDOT's partnership on this important issue as a means to educate all CDL holders on what they need to do, and in the timeframe they are being given.

Bottom line, and my recom-

mendation, is for bus operators and/or state bus associations to FIRST, contact their CDL licensing agency, SECOND, obtain copies of correspondence the agency intends to send to CDL holders, THIRD, share the information with their CDL drivers, and FOURTH, get involved in the process of educating your CDL drivers that ignoring the mail from the licensing agency will result in their inability to make a living for their families.

It is a challenge to find good safe motorcoach drivers so employers need to become involved in the new requirements to keep the drivers they have — after spending many years finding and training them.

I have asked the United Motorcoach Association to bring this issue up at the always-well-attended State Association Summit that is conducted annually as part of UMA Motorcoach Expo. The next Expo will be in February in Long Beach, Calif.

Thank you again for your efforts with this important issue.

Elaine Farrell, CAE
Executive Director
Pennsylvania Bus Association
www.pabus.org

Deadline extended to keep driver records

Motorcoach drivers must keep paper copies of their medical examiner's certificate with them, when they are driving, for another two years, according to a federal rule published last month.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration rule extends the mandate for interstate CDL holders until Jan. 30, 2014. It also continues requiring motorcoach companies to keep paper copies of their drivers' certificates until then.

The rule is a follow-up to the agency's Notice of Proposed Rule-

making, issued last June, which proposed amending a 2008 rule.

That 2008 rule required CDL holders — subject to federal physical qualification — to provide an original or copy of their medical examiner's certificate to their state driver's licensing agency.

State agencies must post the medical certification information in the Commercial Driver's License Information System, the federal electronic database.

During the past two-plus years, however, several states told the FMCSA their offices lacked the

capacity to comply with the rule's Jan. 30, 2012, deadline.

The agency extended the paper copy requirement for drivers and carriers two years to provide sufficient overlap for state agencies.

But, the FMCSA did not extend the deadline for state agencies. Beginning Jan. 30, drivers applying for or renewing CDLs under the non-excepted interstate category will have to self-certify and provide the certificate or a copy to the state licensing agency. All drivers affected by the rule will have to comply by Jan. 30, 2014.

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Alabama operators respond to charter rule challenge

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Although the federal charter service rule has been in place for going on four years, there remain people who apparently haven't gotten the word.

Among them are members of the Birmingham City Council and an area resident who complained publicly — in a letter published in the *Birmingham News* — about the city hiring private bus operators to provide no-fare transportation for a college football game here at the end of October.

The letter suggested the shuttle service for the annual Magic City Classic was a financial loser for Birmingham, and city officials should have used the area's public transit agency instead.

The letter writer's assertions touched a nerve with motorcoach operators in the state and drew a rapid rebuttal from the Alabama Motorcoach Association.

"Birmingham taxpayers did not subsidize the transportation to the event," AMA Executive Director Linda Morris responded in a letter the *News* also published.

She noted that while the shuttle service was free to riders, the city picked up much more revenue from other sources, including increased retail sales and taxes that produced millions of dollars for the community.

"Special events, such as the Magic City Classic, are venues that generate (tax and spending) revenue from restaurants, hotels and many local retailers," she emphasized. "Alabama's bus and motorcoach companies and their employees were proud to participate in the event, particularly in these recessionary times."

The exchange of letters came after the city council decided to provide the non-fare shuttle service for the game, and hired International Trailways of Birmingham to manage the operation.

The idea did not sit well with

Birmingham resident Fred Brashwell, who dashed off a letter to the newspaper questioning the city actions.

"Why didn't the city contact with our own Metro Area Express to provide this service? I'm quite sure MAX could use the money," he wrote. "I ponder how much money the city will lose from shuttle ticket sales."

Morris, in her response, pointed out that the federal charter service rule prohibits buses purchased with federal funds — transit buses most notably — from being used for charter service in competition with private operators.

The rule was adopted in 2008 by the Federal Transit Administration to limit taxpayer-supported public transit agencies from taking away charter work from private carriers.

While Alan Thrasher, chief operating officer of International Trailways and co-owner of Thrasher Brothers Trailways, said he could understand why someone outside of the industry like Brashwell might not understand the charter rule, he was surprised and concerned to find that some members of the Birmingham City Council didn't have a clue about it either.

"It made us really have to work much harder for the contract," he said.

Thrasher said he sold the city council on a three-year, shuttle-service contract for the football game by providing details of the charter rule that showed MAX was prohibited from handling the transportation.

He said although private carriers have been handling the shuttle service for the football game for three years, opposition arose on the council this year because he was asking for a three-year contract worth \$366,000.

"That got them talking about having public transit do the shut-

tles instead of private companies," he said.

The council eventually approved the contract, which allowed him to bring together 14 private carriers that used 75 motorcoaches to transport more than 12,000 people to and from Legion Field where Alabama A&M squeaked past Alabama State 20-19.

Thrasher thinks operators across the U.S. should take steps to determine if their city officials are aware of the charter rule so they can avoid the problems he encountered during his negotiations with the council.

"They should get out and attend city council meetings and see if they understand the charter rule because they are the ones that control the money," he stressed.

Ken Presley, vice president and chief operating officer of the United Motorcoach Association, recommends that operators and state motorcoach associations be alert for opportunities to emphasize the rule to the public and government officials and the important role private bus operators play in their communities.

"When the situation of transit presents itself, it is a wonderful opportunity to inform the public and local community leaders that we are part of the business landscape, that we have employees and families, and we want to work and prosper just like the hotels, restaurants, retailers and other businesses," he said.

"Often, since most carriers are one-dimensional and only offer charter service, our immediate communities may not always recognize us as part of the local infrastructure."

To help operators with the task, he said UMA Motorcoach Expo 2012 in Long Beach, Calif., in early February, will include a session on operators working in and with their communities.

mercial driver's license as required by state law, the DPS said. He was the only one wearing a seatbelt even though all seats were equipped with belts, the DPS noted.

The ElDorado National Aero-tech cutaway built on a 2009 Ford E-450 chassis was traveling at 65

supplies that quickly ran out.

The newspaper reported that, in addition to the high demand regionally, reasons for the shortage include export demand and refineries switching to winter blends.

Fuel exports, especially diesel, have been running at record highs.

mph, according to an onboard computer. The speed limit for that section of the highway is 70 mph.

DPS officials said that once the investigation is completed they would discuss the case with Runnels County prosecutors to determine if any charges would be filed.

In August, the latest month for which the U.S. Energy Department has data, U.S. refiners exported a record average of 895,000 barrels a day of refined fuels, compared with 730,000 barrels a day during the first half of the year. Most went to Central and South America.

Charter rule questions (usually) handled by FTA's ombudsman

WASHINGTON — Private motorcoach operators having questions — or concerns — about the federal charter service rule don't have to look too far for answers.

The Federal Transit Administration has a special ombudsman in its Office of the Chief Counsel who's responsible for helping them and their public transit counterparts understand and work with the regulation.

Although the ombudsman position has been around since the rule was adopted in 2008, its existence may not be well known around the industry, says Ken Presley, vice president and chief operating officer of the United Motorcoach Association.

"We have a lot of new operators who probably aren't aware of it and many others who may have forgotten about it," he said.

The current ombudsman is Kathy Breeden, who took over the job in August, after the original ombudsman, Crystal Frederick, moved to another FTA office.

The FTA said Breeden not only has been fielding numerous new inquiries since she took over, but she's also responding to some that apparently were missed during the transition.

Among them is one that was sent in February by Autumn Dipert Brown of Dan Dipert Coaches in Arlington, Texas, who wondered about the legitimacy of her responding to a

transit agency charter notice with a fewer number of motorcoaches than was requested.

She said she was told earlier by someone in the industry that replying with something different than what was requested by the transit agency could be viewed as a bad faith offer, and she did not want her response viewed in that manner.

So, in February, Brown took her quandary and question to the FTA charter rule ombudsman.

Ten months passed during which Brown heard nothing from the ombudsman's office. Then, last month, out of the blue she received an email from Breeden, asking if her question had ever been answered. When informed it had not, Breeden apologized and offered to find out the answer from the FTA regional counsel.

"Don't bother. Obviously, it is a moot point now," replied Brown, adding that the charter opportunity had long since passed.

The FTA said it was not known how many inquires went unhandled or unresolved, but Breeden is in the process of identifying them and is responding to them as quickly as possible.

Meanwhile, operators with questions or concerns about the charter rule can call Breeden at (202) 366-4011, or email her at ombudsmancharerservice@dot.gov.

Inspector resigns

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

charged only the counties for providing them with safety-certified school bus operators for their school transportation programs.

However, he said that just before the program began this year, CSS and its affiliate TSX decided that carriers wanting to remain in the program would have to begin paying a minimum of \$4,600, and as much as \$11,000, for their fleets to be inspected.

Those that opted out would be on their own and would not be allowed to transport students for counties that were in the CSS and TSX system.

In addition, school districts would have to pay a subscription fee to access those operators approved by TSX.

The changes touched off a firestorm in North Carolina. Hines says he vigorously objected to the fees and the companies eventually agreed to delay them until the 2012 school year.

In his letter of resignation to Hanley, Hines said CSS no longer

commands the respect it had when he joined the company.

"I thought that it was an organization with a very good reputation and one that I would be glad to be associated with," he said. "This is not the case now."

He said having counties under contract for their transportation needs and then forcing carriers to pay for inspections to continue working for them is wrong.

Hines also suggested TSX is being "disingenuous" in its claims that operators have the option to either join or not join the program.

"While the statement in your advertising is true, TSX leaves out the part that says you have to pay to be inspected if you want to transport for anyone in the TSX system," he said.

Although Hines continues the relationship he has had for many years with most of the counties, he said he had a one-year noncompete clause in his employment contract with CSS that will prevent him from doing inspections for them.

"But I do think many of the counties now are looking for other options for next year," he said.

Seatbelts ignored

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

faculty member Michael Nicodemus, lost control as the bus was entering a bend on U.S. 83 in Runnels County on a Friday afternoon.

Nicodemus had a Texas com-

Diesel shortage

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

shortage was particularly bad in the Lincoln area. One of the two fuel terminals south of Lincoln hadn't had any diesel fuel for at least a month, and the other had sporadic

Q&A with guru of UMA Expo Maintenance Interchange

LONG BEACH, Calif. — Over the past dozen years, one of the best-attended and consensus most-valuable events conducted during UMA Motorcoach Expo has been the Maintenance Interchange.

Kevin Whitworth, president and CEO of Whitworth Bus Sales in Miamisburg, Ohio, and a former operator of a successful motorcoach company, coordinates the Maintenance Interchange each year.

Last month, *Bus & Motorcoach News* conducted a question-and-answer session with Whitworth about the Interchange. Here's how he responded to our questions:

Q. For the uninitiated, what exactly is a Maintenance Interchange? Who attends; who doesn't?

A. Simply put, it's a gathering of motorcoach owners, operators, managers and maintenance professionals. No manufactures, OEMs, vendors or sales personnel are permitted. This closed-door atmosphere fosters open-and-frank discussions among attendees of maintenance and daily equipment issues.

Q. Where is it conducted, and how long does it last?

A. It's a one-day event held annually at UMA Motorcoach Expo.

Q. What does it cost?

A. It's free to those who register for Motorcoach Expo.

Q. How many people attend a Maintenance Interchange?

A. Typically we have 95 to 140 in and out of the room during the day. We tally the "years' experience" in the room each year, and it's not uncommon to have 1,300 to 1,400 years of motorcoach maintenance experience sitting all around you.

Q. Is everyone expected to ask questions, or bring up a problem? Or, can I just sit, listen and absorb the information?

A. Attendees participate to whatever extent they are comfortable. You can absorb all day if you wish. If time allows, we try and have a "last call" for each topic at the end of the day for those who did not submit questions earlier.

Q. What should I expect to get out of it?

A. The networking opportunity and knowledge is there for the taking. You could have the vice president of a major fleet operation on your left and on your right have a one-coach operator who drives, maintains and washes his own coach. The men and women who have attended have adopted a "Maintenance Interchange anti-slogan." We do not believe in the phrase: "You are the only one having that problem." This is why we gather, to network and dig as deep as we can to help each other.

Q. I've heard the Maintenance

Interchange is a great place to bring up your toughest, most-challenging maintenance problem(s). Is that true?

A. Absolutely. One of the toughest, most-challenging issues has been the art of "communication and relationships." No matter what is broken on your coach, if you don't have good communication/relationships within the industry, you'll be sitting on the side of the road far longer than expected. And we're not just referring to the operators in the room; we're speaking of the industry in general.

It's not unusual to have an issue come up where an operator has been at war with a manufacture and not reached a resolution. While sitting across the room is another operator who has had the same issue and good results. The simple answer? Communication and relationships.

Q. Can you provide examples of problems people brought to previous Interchanges and came away with solutions or answers?

A. One that readily comes to mind was an alternator problem from years ago. Numerous operators had submitted similar questions regarding premature failures. No one seemed to have an answer when a gentleman sitting off to the side raised his hand to be acknowledged.

He recommended a procedure that should be followed during the rebuilding of the alternator. The only thing I remember was looking over the group and seeing nothing but the tops of heads as everyone wrote down the recommendation. The gentleman, a 40-year veteran of the industry, was a one-coach operator. He drove, washed and maintained his own coach. Two vice presidents of major fleets had the procedure implemented into their fleet maintenance within 10 days.

Q. What about more mundane, day-to-day maintenance/shop issues? Can I pick up ideas I can use every day on the job?

A. Day-to-day shop issues have always been a hot topic. New shop equipment, tools, OSHA issues, and where do we find the next generation of mechanics are all important topics.

Q. Does the Maintenance Interchange have any other events associated with it?

A. A few years ago we started a Maintenance Competition we conduct as part of the Interchange. It's a two-part event with a written test given at the end of the Interchange, and a hands-on inspection competition held the next morning at a local operator's facility.

Q. What do you think is the

most-important takeaway for maintenance technicians and supervisors who attend an Interchange?

A. A couple of things come to mind after 13 years. First and foremost is "you are not the only one having a particular problem." Second, now that you have attended a Maintenance Interchange, use your "networking capability" and your ability to "properly communicate your issues" to those who can help.

Q. What is the most-important takeaway for owners and manag-

ers who attend?

A. You cannot operate and maintain a fleet of motorcoaches at no cost. It costs hard-earned dollars to properly maintain a motorcoach. The distinction between PRE and POST has been well received. PREventative maintenance is much more cost effective than POST-breakdown repair.

In 2012, Kevin Whitworth will coordinate another Maintenance Interchange session at UMA Motorcoach Expo, and guide Whitworth Bus Sales in marking its 40th

year in business. Besides new-and-used sales, Whitworth Bus also operated a successful motorcoach operation from 1983 to 2000.

For more information about UMA Motorcoach Expo and the Maintenance Interchange, go to www.motorcoachexpo.com.



Kevin Whitworth

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WINNIPEG, Manitoba — Motor Coach Industries gathered employees from throughout its production facilities to mark delivery of the 6,000th MCI unit off the company E/J-model assembly line here.

Keys to the new J4500 went to the Shriners of British Columbia and Yukon, which will use the coach to provide medical transportation for children.

“Everyone at MCI has an important role in providing our customers with industry leading, quality coaches,” said Bryan Couch, MCI vice president and general manager of operations.

“Achieving this milestone coincides with our J4500 coach ranking as North America’s best-selling intercity coach, a distinction it has enjoyed for seven years running. We take great pride in this accomplishment. We appreci-

ate the trust our customers place in MCI models to transport their passengers in comfort, safety and reliability, and the confidence they have knowing that MCI will continue to innovate and build the coaches best suited to their needs.”

Guy Tessier, MCI vice president of Canadian sales, added that the company “couldn’t be happier about handing the keys to the (6000th coach to the) Shriners Care Cruisers program, which we have been proud to serve since its inception.”

The Shriners program provides coach transportation -- at no cost — to children with burns, orthopedic issues and spinal-cord injuries to Shriners Hospitals in Portland, Ore., and Spokane, Wash., as well as patients to and from Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children and BC Children’s Hospital, both in Vancouver. The cruisers also transport

pregnant women.

It is the largest Shriners hospital transportation program west of the Mississippi River, operating five MCI coaches shuttling roughly 3,500 passengers annually, with each coach traveling anywhere from 300-550 miles a day, six days a week.

Ralph Eschenwecker, who has rejoined MCI as vice president of business excellence, a new position, said of the 6000th coach: “This milestone also marks a turning point at MCI. We are fully committed to improving the entire value stream to the customer with better communication, processes and employee engagement to further the reliability of our models and aftermarket services.”

Motor Coach Industries delivered its 5000th E/J model coach just over three years ago. (See Sept. 15, 2008, *Bus & Motorcoach News*.)

Better than eyes

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The 6D-Vision system needs only about 0.2 seconds to detect potential collisions across the full field-of-view of its camera, which is near 180 degrees. And its image is crisp and clean, not fuzzy in places like ours.

Collecting clues

Seeing is one thing, but a bigger challenge is understanding what we’re seeing quickly enough to react. This might mean anticipating the actions of a complete stranger, perhaps a pedestrian or a bicyclist, maybe another vehicle, with very few clues that we’ve only picked up as blurred peripheral images.

It takes a very alert driver to continuously collect those clues and see what’s going on ahead, and then a biggish brain to decide that an obstacle might be moving into our path.

The very best among us might be good enough to grasp this. But in many cases it may not be alert enough, good enough or fast enough to react in time.

Enter 6D Vision, with its ability to recognize danger quickly and to distinguish between static and moving obstacles. Add to that Daimler’s ability to supply the electronic controls or systems needed to produce an automatic evasive reaction.

The principle here, developed by Daimler researchers, is that moving objects such as other vehicles, cyclists or pedestrians are detected and analyzed before they cross the driving path. Potential

collision hazards are defined within a split second.

The system uses a stereo camera system to perceive the surroundings in 3D, similar to the way

‘Researchers have essentially mimicked basic human perception capability on a microchip.’

a human eye works. But it doesn’t just see potential obstacles as static objects; it sees them in motion. By continuously analyzing the object’s image sequence — frame by frame, almost pixel by pixel — the moving direction and the speed of the person or vehicle can be computed as well.

This enables a prediction of where the obstacle will be in, say, half a second.

6D Vision is based on what the Daimler researchers call a “track before detect” algorithm. That is, a motion is determined before the image details are grouped into an object. This avoids the typical errors of other stereo methods that first form objects and then try to determine motion by tracking them.

This is where the Daimler system reportedly excels. By needing to detect only parts of the whole image that may be an errant cyclist, the system isn’t fooled by partially hidden objects, those that may be very close together in space, and other difficult viewing conditions.

The 6D Vision system can determine the collision risk for every

single image point, independent of an object detection step.

The researchers have essentially mimicked basic human perception capability on a microchip.

As an aside, they get the technology’s name this way: calculation of the obstacle’s position in three dimensions, plus motion in an additional three dimensions results in “6D Vision.”

How fast is fast?

Speed, obviously, is a critical factor in unexpected roadway situations. A child running unexpectedly into the road, for example, is perceived by 6D Vision within 200 milliseconds. Even the most alert person takes twice as long to do that, and if distracted in some way, a further 500 milliseconds can be added.

Then, there’s an additional moment of shock to create further delay until a reaction kicks in. We’re talking one second plus.

In purely mathematical terms, one second at a speed of 30 mph equates to a vehicle covering a distance of around 45 feet. The computer works twice as fast as the driver and initiates safety measures after just 20 feet.

In an emergency braking situation, the vehicle comes to a standstill more than 20 feet sooner.

Since 6D Vision technology can contribute significantly to accident reduction, Daimler aims to make it available to other manufacturers.

The first vehicle with the technology will be the next Mercedes-Benz S-Class generation, which will be launched in 2013.

It is a given that 6D Vision will eventually show up on buses and trucks.

Nominations being sought for UMA Green Highway Award

LONG BEACH, Calif. — Nominations are being sought for the United Motorcoach Association Green Highway Award, which is presented annually to a motorcoach operator at the UMA Motorcoach Expo.

The award, which is sponsored by Motor Coach Industries, was introduced at UMA Motorcoach Expo in 2008. It recognizes motorcoach travel as a viable solution to the reduction of carbon emissions, and to encourage industry leadership with a positive impact on our environment.

The award will be presented to

a motorcoach operator that demonstrates the greatest commitment to “green stewardship” in the areas of internal corporate initiative, external corporate stewardship, or community and industry-wide green leadership.

The award will be presented in February during Motorcoach Expo 2012 in Long Beach.

Nominations are due Wednesday, Dec. 21. A nomination form can be found at www.motorcoach-expo.com under Quick Links. Direct questions to Maggie Masterson of UMA; call (800) 424-8262, or e-mail mmasterson@uma.org.

Onboard readers

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Destination and roadside inspections are aided by providing information that can lead to a good driving record and an improved fleet-CSA score.

When approached by a vehicle inspection officer, Greene Coach drivers have been instructed to tell the inspector “we’re all electronic, please step in the bus.” If the officer is not familiar with the ISE unit, the driver will walk the officer through the system that displays the complete driving record right up to the minute, and can review it for the previous seven days.

The touch-screen system shows exactly how many hours and minutes the driver has remaining before he or she must go off duty. This feature alone “takes the driver out of the argument” when groups want to extend the driving time beyond legal limits, says Ooten.

Safety directors, fleet managers, dispatchers, maintenance personnel and owners use eFleetSuite’s web application for real-time and paperless compliance and resource management.

Adopting such a system requires everyone, especially dispatchers, to be more mindful of travel and wait times and ultimately driver hours.

As might be imagined, Greene met considerable driver resistance

when he adopted the system, but he says even his veteran drivers have embraced the units.

“We continue to be impressed with the features of the eFleetSuite system. The seamless integration between the electronic driver logs and driver vehicle inspection reporting applications is unique and ensures that needed information for safety compliance and vehicle maintenance is consistently captured,” says Ooten.

“The compliance mapping feature allows dispatchers (and others in the company) to check on our drivers’ locations and it shows us a color-coded view of their available hours, as well as current location. This is helping us make better planning decisions. We couldn’t ask for a better partner,” Ooten added.

Ooten and his staff worked closely with ISE to fine tune the system for motorcoach application. “We taught each other on this; what will work and what won’t,” said Ooten.

Greene Coach was founded by Ooten’s father 66 years ago. It provides charter services and specialty tours, operating a fleet of eight coaches, a midsize and a minibus.

Ooten believes EOBRs are inevitable and will level the playing field by helping get noncompliant operators — that “stretch the day” — off the road.

To learn more about the ISE system, go to www.isefleetservices.com.



The ISE Fleet Services eFleetSuite EOBR has a seven-inch touch screen.

Fatigue management: There's no substitute for judgment

By Dave Millhouser

Walter was beat. He'd been driving for more than 24 hours and had been promised a relief driver would be waiting at the next truckstop.

It turned out Walter wasn't promised a fresh driver, only a new one, and he watched as his relief staggered off a bus he'd been driving for 12 hours and into the driver's seat of Walter's coach.

Walter dozed off in the seat behind the driver, and was sleeping soundly when he felt a poke in his ribs. The teenaged passenger sitting next to him was alarmed because the bus was weaving, seeming to select lanes at random and she was afraid the new driver was asleep at the wheel.

Raising one eyelid, Walter turned to her and said: "Shut-up kid, he's just practicing his passing."

This was "back in the day." The rules didn't apply to us; we were a nonprofit and exempt. The way we operated was legal, even if it was exceedingly dumb.

There has always been a gap between what is legal and what is

right. No matter how well intentioned, regulations can never completely bridge the divide.

Currently, there are a number of studies being done on fatigue and how best to regulate hours of service.

There also is talk of grouping us with truckers, and we should point out that driving a coach is less grueling than a truck, and more hours for us may be safe.

New technologies that recognize fatigue are being developed and it appears electronic onboard recorders are coming. New tools will be available to manage driver behavior.

A weakness of "rules" is that they are aimed at average performers; on the other hand, new technology may provide real-time alerts when an individual is tired. A driver who can drive 10 hours one day, may only be safe for eight the next. The goal is managing fatigue, not hours.

Once past the hiccups that new stuff brings, these developments will help make us safer. Still, technology and regulation won't completely get the job done.

Two well-known examples

help make the point.

In one case, a driver is facing jail time as a result of a fatal accident where he had more than adequate time off but chose to spend it in a casino, rather than bed.

In another, from a regulatory viewpoint, the company and driver of the Bluffton University chartered bus that wrecked on an Atlanta overpass had done virtually everything right. Even so, seven people died.

The first illustrates there is no substitute for judgment. Why did the driver think the company got him a room? The letter of the law offers few protections without honoring its spirit.

Educate drivers on the effects of fatigue, acquaint them with the consequences of silly behavior, and encourage them to make wise use of time off. That includes actually sleeping, being careful what medicines they ingest, and even what they eat. Make a presentation on fatigue at driver meetings.

The Bluffton case makes a different point. In this case, around dawn, a rested driver failed to comprehend highway markings and drove off an overpass. The key

word in that sentence is "dawn."

It's accepted science that human beings have two dramatic "down" times. Just before dawn is the biggie, with mid-afternoon another. Accident statistics bear this out dramatically and, as this incident illustrates, even a rested driver can be "down" at dawn.

Filmed while driving early in the morning, and KNOWING they were being studied, test drivers still fell into "micronaps."

Truck drivers know it and many self regulate. Check a highway rest area around sunup and you'll see tons of trucks parked while drivers nap.

Line operators can take a hint from the sleeping truckers, adjusting schedules to include stops at dawn.

Many charter companies correctly discourage customers from taking trips that include driving all night. Preventing sleep deprivation can be a component of your sales process, resisting risky business. Leave an unreasonable consumer to the competition. Let your competitor bet their company's future.

When clients insist, encourage drivers to take a break near sunup.

One sunup solution is banning commercial vehicles from operating during that dangerous hour.

Currently it's possible for a driver to "cushion" for 10 hours of "on duty/not driving," and then legally drive another five. Legal perhaps but so is kissing a porcupine's butt.

In ye olden days, we had a guy who would drive from Chicago to Denver, bypassing a relief driver waiting in Lincoln, Neb. We had to institute "Sandy's rule," where the relief driver got paid (and Sandy didn't) for half the miles.

While driving a thousand miles nonstop is a bad idea, isn't it fun to be part of an industry where most folks want to work so much we have to hold 'em back?

Dave Millhouser is a bus industry marketing consultant and freelance writer. Contact him by email at: Davemillhouser@gmail.com.



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J.J. Keller announces online OSHA event tracking system

NEENAH, Wis. — J.J. Keller & Associates Inc. has launched OSHA Incident Tracker, an online tool providing subscribers with workplace injury and illness management capabilities for OSHA 300 and state workers' compensation-recording and -reporting requirements.

Keller says the online format makes it easier and quicker to comply with OSHA recordkeeping requirements.

The basic version of the OSHA Incident Tracker is designed to help subscribers determine whether an injury or illness is recordable and provides them with step-by-step guidance for capturing incident-related information that will be reported on Forms 300, 301 and 300A.

The service then calculates an organization's incident rate and helps subscribers identify and address safety issues.

Through a basic version, subscribers also can sort data and generate reports, including a Sharps Injury Log.

"OSHA and other regulatory agencies are constantly making changes that affect recordkeeping requirements and forms," says Travis Rhoden, workplace safety subject matter expert at J.J. Keller. "The OSHA Incident Tracker helps companies stay on top of those changes because we're keeping the forms and information current for them. With the impending change to Form 300 to add the column for musculoskeletal disorders, having a service that is constantly updated is extremely valuable."

Companies can go to www.jj-keller.com/form300 to learn about introductory pricing for the basic version, or go to www.oshaincidenttracker.com to register for a free 30-day trial of the full version.

ABC acquires N.J. body company

JERSEY CITY, N.J. — ABC Companies has acquired Hudson Body Co., a full-service body repair facility that has been around for nearly 65 years and is readily accessible to much of the New York City metro area.

Hudson Body has been owned and operated by the Gerace family since its founding in 1947.

Equipped with nine bays, paint booths and portable lifts, Hudson Body specializes in bus and truck body repairs, serving operators of small, medium and large fleets, and delivering a wide range of services.

The facility, staffed by nine employees, many of which have more than 20 years of experience, is across the Hudson River from Lower Manhattan and between the

approaches of the Holland and Lincoln tunnels, and just off the New Jersey Turnpike Extension.

Plans are in development for an extensive renovation of the existing facility to expand the service and parts operations.

"We're excited to have a facility this close to New York City," said Dane Cornell, president and CEO of ABC Companies.

"We can offer more expertise and convenience to customers in the Northeast corridor, with services focused on helping operators maintain peak fleet operations."

The Hudson Body facility will be under the supervision of Mike Laffan, ABC Northeast region general manager. Mike Zaccario, former general manager of the

Hudson operation, will remain in a sales management function.

ABC also operates a sales and service center in Camden, N.J., in the southern part of the state.

In addition to body repairs, plus general bus and truck repairs and services, Hudson Body is capable of handling:

- Paint, lettering and decal installation
- Major and minor collision repairs
- Interior, electrical and related components
- Structural and suspension repairs
- Manufacturer warranty repairs

The facility will continue to operate under the Hudson Body name, dba ABC Companies.

Social changes = technician shortage

VALE, Ore. — A longtime high school automotive instructor suggests that if there is a shortage of qualified commercial vehicle and automotive technicians today it probably stems from changes in society over the years.

Merle Saunders recently retired as automotive instructor at Vale (Ore.) High School. He's a member of the National Teacher's Hall of Fame and led two-person teams of his student technicians to the finals of the Ford/AAA Student Auto Skills competition 24 times over the past 31 years, winning five.

"Due to our instant society, stu-

dents have more difficulty staying focused if the task isn't mastered quickly," Saunders told *Light & Medium Truck* magazine. "As society changes, so must teaching strategies change to keep students engaged."

"There are several factors to (the) lack of qualified repair technicians," Saunders said. "The first might be the... difficulty staying focused. Because of the sophistication of today's vehicles; if it is not easy many give up and move on."

"The second might be that there are more and more required classes to graduate from high school, and the push for all stu-

dents to attend four-year colleges and universities.... This leaves less-and-less time for vocational and technical education at the high school level.

"The third might be that as funding for education continues to be spread thinner with more mandates, this leaves expensive vocational and technical programs closed," he noted.

"If we could address these three issues, I believe this would go along way in resolving our shortage," said Saunders.

More than 100 of his former students work in the vehicle repair industry.

High court shuns biodiesel fuel case

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court has declined to hear a request from the oil and chemical industry to strike down the federal government's Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS).

In refusing to hear the case, the court has affirmed the USEPA renewable fuels standard, meaning the U.S. remains on the road to more biodiesel fuel.

The National Petrochemical and Refiners Association, along with the American Petroleum Institute, submitted a petition in July for the U.S. Supreme Court to take

up the case.

The request centered on whether a federal agency that misses a statutory deadline for writing regulations may engage in retroactive rulemaking based on implied, rather than express, authorization from Congress.

The National Biodiesel Board, a supporter of the Renewable Fuel Standard, said it was pleased that the Supreme Court put an end to the litigation.

"The RFS program is working just as Congress intended. It's creating jobs across the country. It's

breaking our addiction to oil. It's helping clean our air, and it's reducing greenhouse gases," said Anne Steckel, NBB vice president of federal affairs.

"This year alone, the biodiesel industry is on pace to produce at least 800 million gallons of advanced biofuel, while supporting more than 31,000 jobs. We're pleased to see the Supreme Court put an end to this litigation as we continue building a strong U.S. biodiesel industry."

Biodiesel is produced in nearly every state.

Got milk? How about retreadable tires?

If you have good used tire carcasses gathering dust in your shop, now might be a good time to get rid of them.

The price increases most commercial tire makers tacked onto their new tires earlier this year have pushed up demand for retreaded tires, industry experts report.

"I can tell you that retreaders are just booming," Marvin Bozarth, president of Bozarth Tire Industry Consultants of Shelbyville, Ky., and senior technical consultant to the Tire Industry Association told a trucking publication. "They can't get enough casings to meet demand."

He said the high price of new

tires was behind much of the boom.

The 45 percent increase in tire prices from just a few years ago has been a burden for smaller operators, he noted.

According to an executive with Bridgestone Commercial Solutions, about half of all commercial tires are retreaded.

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